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What Housing does: Changes in an Accra Community

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U S A

Summary

This paper is concerned with change in a long-settled migrant community in Accra, Ghana, and specifically with the cultural and spatial components in the home. The settlement was established in 1912, primarily for the Hausa people. Houses were equipped with an entry hut for the man of the house and his male friends, and the segregated women's quarters for the houseowner's wives, both facilitating sheltering adult women from the gaze of unrelated adult men. Over the years, houses have been built without these features, and dwellings no longer contain the members of a family only. Looking at the evolution of housing in the community of Sabon Zongo, one sees the conflation of Hausa vernacular, southern Ghanaian traditions and western influence.

Résumé

L'article décrit les changements intervenus dans une communauté de migrants devenus sédentaires et vivant à Accra (Ghana); il s'agit plus particulièrement des aspects culturels et spatiaux de l'habitat. La communauté fut fondée en 1912, par des membres du groupe Hausa principalement. Les bâtiments comportaient une hutte d'entrée réservée au maître de maison et à ses amis de sexe masculin, ainsi que des quartiers ségrégés occupés par les femmes du propriétaire; cette disposition visait à protéger les femmes adultes des regards d'hommes non-parents. Au cours des années, on a commencé à construire des maisons ne comportant plus ces éléments et qui n'abritent plus les membres d'une seule famille. L'évolution de l'habitat dans la communauté de Sabon Zongo manifeste une fusion entre des éléments appartenant aux traditions vernaculaires Hausa et Ghanéenne du sud et une influence occidentale.

1. Introduction [1]

> "The appropriation and use of space are political acts. The kinds of spaces we have, don't have, or are denied access to can empower us or render us powerless. Spaces can enhance or restrict, nurture or impoverish" (Weisman, 1981: 7).

A people's culture - its norms, values, attitudes, symbolic representations - and the social connections which that culture regulates - the organization of individuals into groups, the statuses of individuals and groups, the relationship of the groups to one another - are both grounded in space. That is to say, people interact within physically defined areas in a particular way, according to the meaning attached to those areas. The physical environment limits the range of possible types of social behaviour, the space defines the people in it; the sociocultural component fills the space with meaning, the presence of individuals engaging in certain interactions or activities defines the space (Ardener, 1981).

Both social and physical space are organized systems, with boundaries, and they are mutually reflexive. They are linked by a series of mechanisms or relationships (Michelson, 1970; Rapoport, 1976). Physical and social organization are modes of encoding information; they communicate. Life style, which varies with culture, is evident in social organization. And this in turn harmonizes with spatial organization, as people behave in accordance with spatial cues.

A cultural group is guided by a worldview, evident in its attendant norms and values. Some, such as codes or etiquette, modes of speech, rules of marriage, are easily articulated. Others, operating "out-of-awareness" (Hall, 1959) may be less accessible to scrutiny but just as salient. The latter includes the way in which a group of people designs its physical world (Rapoport, 1984), as well as the association between the kinds of shelters built and the "predisposing cultural habits" of a people (Banham, 1973; Lawrence, 1982). When anthropologists have looked at the design of housing, they have tended to focus on its symbolic meanings and purposes (Bourdieu, 1973; Cunningham, 1973). Yet, studies of domestic architecture can also provide data on such basic issues of ethnography as social organization, religion, and economic activities (Schwerdtfeger, 1982).

It is not just that people are grounded in space; they have developed that space, built it up and built on it, divided it up into varying shapes and sizes, marked it as their own. Using the imperatives of their culture, it is people who order space, which then shapes human behaviour (Greenbie, 1981). As Rapoport (1982, 57) notes, these spatial cues encode social information, establishing the context and defining the situation; this in turn influences human behaviour. The house, for example, embodies

> "ideologies about how people should live, what kinds of values and hierarchies should be fostered within the family, and how its occupants should relate to the public world" (Torre, 1981, 51).

[1] The research for this paper was carried out in 1982, in Accra, and was supported by grants from Syracuse University, The Appleby-Mosher Foundation, and the American Philosophical Society. This paper was originally prepared for the Built Form and Culture Conference, University of Kansas, November 1986. It was also read at the African Studies Association meeting, Denver CO, November 1987. Richard Warms, William Mangin, Susan Kent, Setha Low and Kris Hardin were kind enough to read and comment on an earlier version.

Cross-culturally, the house is women's spatial domain; it is here that they are most strongly connected. We see this for the Navajo (Witherspoon, 1975), urban American Blacks (Stack, 1974), working class East Londoners (Young & Willmott, 1972), Iranians (Wright, 1981), the imperial Chinese (Pollock, 1981), Anglo-Saxon culture (Lawrence, 1982), northern Nigerian Hausa (Pittin, 1979), urban Greeks (Hirschon, 1981), to name a few. That their spatial identification is overwhelmingly domestic explains their differentiation from men. There is nothing ethereal about female role imperatives when they are viewed as grounded in physical space and reflected in physical structures - be they kitchens or nurseries. Simultaneously, women's physical placement provides support for the ideology, and energizes the cultural definition of female roles. We see the realization of women's relationships to one another, to men, to children, to society at large, in their placing in space. The division of space according to sex role differentiation reinforces sexual stereotypes, carries certain understandings of what the permissible roles and behaviours of each sex are, and may limit or enhance the learning of a variety of skills (Weisman, 1981).

If rules separating women from men obtain, there are devices to maintain their apartness (Ardener, 1981). The more formal the social understandings, the more concrete the spatial dimension - although, should physical barriers be absent, this does not mean that the social rule is as well. Indeed, Rapoport (1980, 31) lists a variety of non-physical mechanisms used to prevent interaction; he includes rules (hierarchies, avoidance, manners) and psychological devices (internal withdrawal). If the ideology decrees that women are not only to be separate from men, socially and spatially, but also subordinate to them, then both social and spatial structures define further a *hierarchy* of relationships among the sexes, within the house and without. By delimiting the areas of women's mobility, in a spatial sense, one is also bounding their social and economic options.

In this paper, I trace the evolution of housing in a migrant community in Accra, Ghana, looking specifically at the relation between spatial structures and the ethos of sexual segregation.

2. Tradition

The Hausa are a trading people, who established communities throughout Nigeria and Niger, Chad and Ghana, carrying Islam with them. In the northern Nigeria homeland, men and women are so segregated from one another as to occupy two different worlds (Callaway, 1987). They observe a strict sexually defined division of labour. They celebrate kinship rites and festivals separately. Hausa custom and Muslim law not only conceptualize women as a group apart, but classify them as legal, political and religious minors and the economic wards of men (Callaway, 1987; Schildkrout, 1986; Smith, 1978, 42; Yeld, 1960). Judged unsuited for public duties, they are relegated to the non-public domain, the arena for family life where women play a central role. Heterosexual contact is circumscribed by rules and regulations of both a social and spatial sort, based upon a code of modesty. The position of women varies according to the extensiveness of spatial segregation, its most extreme form being represented by the institution of *kulle* or *purdah.*

Purdah is a means of enforcing not just the division between men and women, but the ranking of them relative to one another. It symbolizes cultural attitudes toward women, as expressed in Islamic law. As stated in the Koran, Sura 4: 34,

> "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women,
> Because God has given the one more {strength} than the other..."
> (1975, 190)

The twin customs of veiling and secluding women symbolize this asymmetry. They provide the 'symbolic shelter' of the honour of the family, overseen by men and imposed upon women. The Koran, however, is ambiguous on how wifely modesty is to be enforced, and this has generated a range of modes. Variability in modes of such 'shelter' conveys the differences implicit in the female experience, say spatial confinement as opposed to subtleties of speaking behaviour, and the attendant freedoms and constraints (see for example Vatuk, 1982, for India; Khatib-Chahidi, 1981, for Iran).

Seclusion bespeaks a delineation of the practitioner's range of social contacts and activities, which is mirrored in physical space - the sequestering of women in an exclusive and private domain, the division of the household into male and female sectors, indeed, the division of the world into male and female domains, and the contrivances employed to advertise this fact to those outside the household and to socialize those within. It is the manner and mode of physical confinement.

Marriage and family law and the religion of Islam and Hausa culture establish the subordinate position of women (Callaway, 1987). Their modesty must be guarded. The latter task is easily accomplished by secluding them, and this in turn communicates their subordinate status. Men exert social control which translates into spatial control over the adult women of their compounds (Callaway, 1987; Pittin, 1984).

In Northern Nigeria, the norm of seclusion is so well established

> "that it is primarily its absence which attracts attention, bringing shame upon the offending wife and her husband" (Pittin, 1984, 474).

Even husbands and wives do not usually socialize with one another; indeed, to show respect, they do not eat together, interact or address one another by name (Callaway, 1987). Nor do they share physical space. Hausa compounds (Figure 1) are walled and face inward, and one notices immediately that the interior courtyard *(cikin gida)*, where the women live, can only be entered through a series of entrance rooms (Moughtin, 1964; Schwerdtfeger, 1982). In fact, one must pass the husband's hut, if he has one, to arrive at their quarters. This kind of seclusion necessitates a special social role allocation, for example, someone to carry in water if there is no pipe, or to make necessary food purchases for meal preparation.

It also necessitates social and spatial ordering of the female inhabitants, whose shared spatial ties are primarily with one another. They form a society within a society, sharing experiences, delights, sadnesses with other women. Their spatial confinement has consequences for the relationships among them, making them more complex as they are so frequently in one another's physical presence. Order is a necessity. Despite Islam, divorce is common, an adult woman marrying an average of four times. Marriage is virilocal, thus it is the women, not the men, who do the relocation. Consequently, in a large household women may be moving in and out with some frequency. If they are to share the public compound space, to engage in household chores together, to live in peace, their relationships must be ordered. Moreover, while some co-wifely ties are positive - Baba of Karo tells of persuading her husband to take as a wife a woman she liked, whose child she then "fostered" (Smith, 1981, 175) - many are negative: the word for jealousy is *kishiya*, for co-wife is *kishi*. Problems are controlled for in part by ranking the wives and by allocating to each a well-defined space

of her own - *daki* - which the man often does not have, rotating between his wives or sleeping in the entrance hut.

Purdah is sanctioned by religious teachings and values, but it is more understandable in economic terms - i.e. the expendability of the wife's labour and the social prestige of the husband whose wife is secluded, and of the secluded woman. Indeed, *purdah* is increasing in both urban and rural areas of the Hausa homeland. This may be connected with the rural women's refusal to farm, their preference for craft and trade activities, to be conducted at their own leisure (Pittin, 1984; Smith, 1981, 23). And work they do, both despite and due to their seclusion. The secluded women's economic life has turned their homes into individual markets, "honeycomb" markets (Hill, 1969), which are connected by children on behalf of the mothers (Callaway, 1987; Schildkrout, 1979, 1983).

In any case, even those in lower economic strata, despite "strained economic circumstances keep wives in complete seclusion" (Adamu, 1973, cited in Pittin, 1984, 474).

3. The Early *Zongo*

A *zongo* (Hausa work meaning 'stranger quarter') is a community in both a spatial and a social sense. Peil (1979, 126) describes Ghana's *zongos* as "northern", characterized by religious preference (Islam), education (enthusiasm for Arabic, resistance to western) and cultural orientation. The *zongos* have been strongly influenced by the Nigerian Hausa, whose presence in Accra dates back to the late 19th century. Sabon Zongo (new *zongo*), located on the periphery of Accra, has been characterized as a "low status migrant sink" (Brand, 1972, 292). It was founded in 1912 by one Malam Bako, a Hausa leader who felt that his followers needed more space than they had; he also welcomed the opportunity to create a distinct Hausa quarter, to replicate the lifeways that they had left behind in their northern Nigerian homeland and to observe Islamic orthodoxy (Pellow, 1985).

Ghanaian vernacular house structures are composed of a variety of characteristics, each of which may predominate in one part of the country; for example, rectilinear layout is found in the south and circular layout in the northeast. In addition, there have been exogenous historical influences on building techniques, materials, and forms; of major import has been the penetration of the Europeans in the south and the Muslims in the north (Faculty of Architecture, 1978, 449-50). Whatever the building types, however, they express one central concept:

> "The indigenous concept of a family dwelling, commonly described as the courtyard - or compound house" (Ibid., 453).

This transcends ethnic divisions, although it assumes a diversity of forms.

Sabon Zongo consists of about 22 acres of land. When Malam Bako founded the community, the compounds were built as family establishments. They followed the traditional African house plan of rooms arranged within or around a courtyard. Among the forest belt Ashanti in southern Ghana (Rutter, 1971) and Accra's indigenous Ga (Field, 1940), the arrangement is rectangular, and the individual rooms are round huts. Hausa vernacular architecture, like that of the Ashanti, exhibits the gradation of space from public to private. The Ga recognize the difference in male and female needs and lifestyles. They traditionally house men and women in sex-specific compounds, but

there is no ideological barrier to traffic between them. As already indicated, the Hausa recognize not just sexual differences but stratification, and they have built this into their compounds.

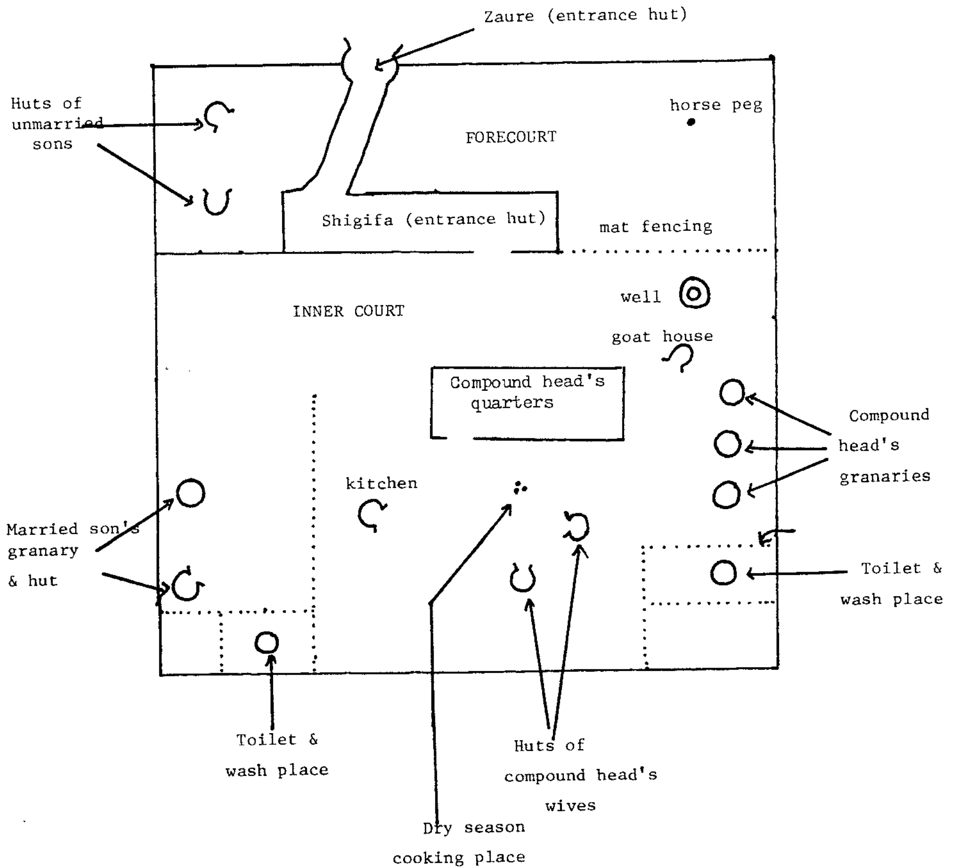

Fig. 1 A traditional Hausa compound in northern Nigeria (from M.F. Smith, 1981, 36).
Un groupe de maisons traditionnel Hausa au nord de Nigeria (extrait de M.F. smith, 1981, 36).

The sense of today's Sabon Zongo elders is that wife seclusion was normative for the early Hausa residents of the community, although they disagree as to the degree of seclusion that was practiced, whether it was *kulle* or *tsare* [2]. In those times, Sabon Zongo was predominantly Hausa; only Hausa married Hausa. Marital custom, therefore, could be preserved, including some degree of seclusion. Malam Gambo and Alhaji Hamisu, Bako's surviving sons, remember how, when they were young, all of the adult women in their family and in the *zongo* were in *purdah* - "They did not go anywhere". If Malam Bako saw a woman out on the street, he would call her husband in to chastise him for her immodest behaviour. This is not to say that women were entirely immobilized. With their husbands' express permission (as in Kano today), they could attend special events, such as marriages or baby outdoorings, where the others in attendance were all women; and on other occasions, especially after dark, they visited their family. Travelling in the company of other women or children and wearing a shawl over the head, they were provided with a moving shield of protection which communicated to men that they should keep their distance.

In addition to fulfilling their domestic responsibilities - taking care of children, cooking, seeing after the needs of their husbands - the women worked from within the home, as do secluded women in Kano today (cf. Schildkrout, 1979, 1982; Callaway, 1987). Their maidservants or their children were their runners. The women's economic ventures were very much a spin-off of their household personas, and defined by the quality of the space within which they operated. The men's lives, meanwhile, were played out outside of the home. They were public persons who primarily worked as traders - in kola nuts, cows, and sheep, as well as other products - but also as teachers *(mallams)*, tailors, butchers, barbers and praise-singers *(marokis)*.

In those days, unrelated people (tenants) generally did not live in the family house. Once pubescent, boys no longer entered the women's area. And, as already indicated, the entrance hut was the furthest into the compound that 'strange' (unrelated) men could penetrate.

Male-female lines of division were thus well-reinforced, based upon cultural precept and spatial norms. The only people who freely entered and left the compound were the resident males.

> "Even if you didn't have money, you could do *kulle* [3]
>
> for
>
> "at that time, when you had even a penny, you could be satisfied with that one penny" [4]

The compound of headman Malam Bako, while larger and more elaborate than others, serves to illustrate the ideal layout and the principles of social organization accommodated in Sabon Zongo (Figure 2). As among indigenous southern Ghanaians, the house is rectangular. As among the Hausa, the interior courtyard, *cikin gida*, where the women live, can only be entered through a series of entrance rooms. To

[2] Much of the confusion is semantic, as people in Accra use the two terms interchangeably. Marriage is distinguished according to the degree of seclusion. In Kano, *kulle dinga* is complete seclusion, which is restricted to the wives of *mallams* (teachers) and emirs; *kulle tsare*, on the other hand, is less severe and most commonly practised. As a universal practice in Kano, *tsare* has developed within the lifetimes of older women (Callaway, 1987).

[3] Interview with Alhaji Hamisu Bak22o, 6/4/82.

[4] Interview with Chief Sh'aibu Bako, 5/11/82.

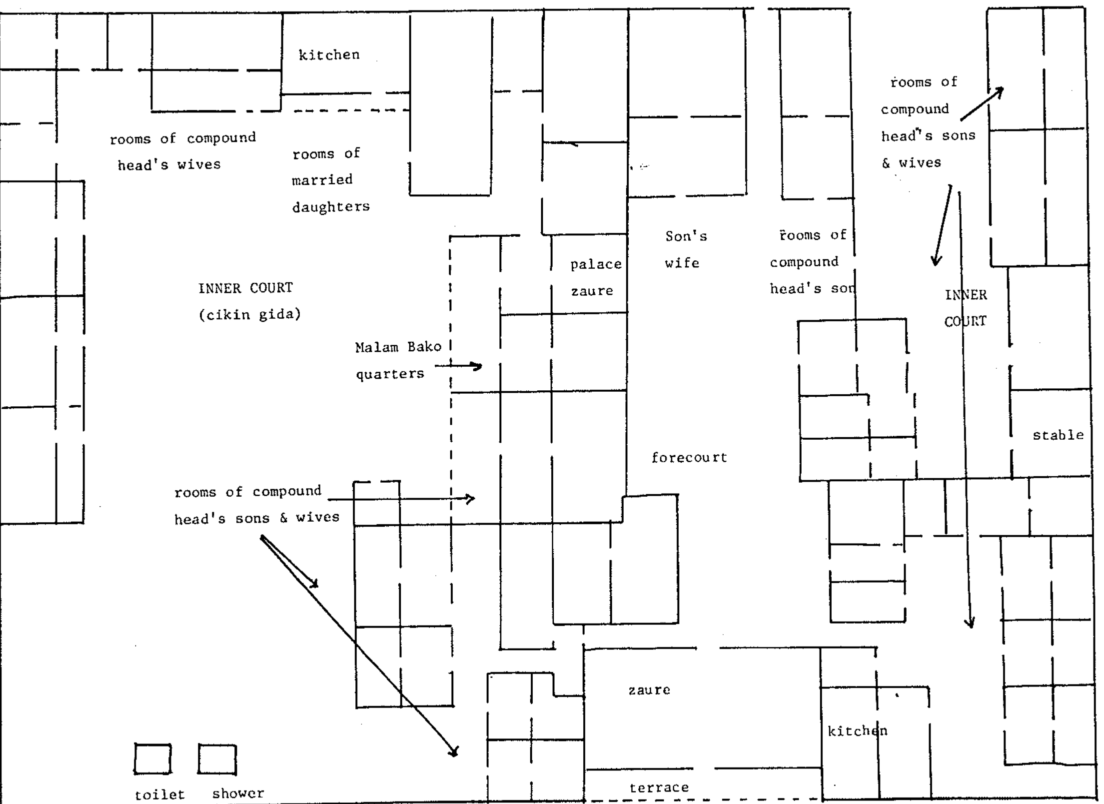

Fig. 2 The compound of headman Malam Bako, while larger and more elaborate than others, illustrates the ideal layout and the principles of social organization in Sabon Zongo

La résidence du chef Malam Bako, bien que plus grande et plus élaborée que d'autres, fournit un exemple de plan idéal et des principes de l'organisation sociale à Sabon Zongo

maintain their segregation, there is a *zaure* or *kofa* at the entrance to the compound, where the houseowner's male friends can come to socialize with him while he practices his craft, or sups, or just enjoys some moments of leisure. As Malam Bako acted in the capacity of community headman, the *zaure* was a capacious room, for it was there that he met with elders and judged disputes.

True to form, few of the Bako compound rooms are directly accessible from the forecourt, ensuring the privacy of the women. There are two inner courts. That to the right leads into the rooms of some of Malam Bako's adult sons and their wives. There is also a stable here, where the Malam kept horses. The court to the left could be entered only through a second entrance room *(shigifa)*, which also has a *zaure* and where only close associates or especially important persons would be entertained. The second entrance room opens into the *cikin gida*, where the household head might or might not have his own room - Malam Bako did - but where each wife must have her own quarters for herself and her young offspring.

Situated as she was, the secluded Sabon Zongo woman's social relationships were not only restricted but formalized. The potential for disharmony among co-wives necessitated careful regulation of the wives' social and spatial behaviour in the house - allocating to each her own physical domain and equal time to cook for and sleep with her husband. As their movement was carefully monitored, at least during daylight hours, their most important or regular spatial relationships were with their co-wives and children (cf. Pittin, 1979), which further underlined the separateness of the female world. Women ate with one another and/or their children, men ate alone or with their male friends in the *zaure*. Just as the women's occupation of the space provided social definition to it, so the space defined their social roles (cf. Ardener, 1981; Weisman, 1981; Wright, 1981; Callaway, 1981). Their sole spatial association was domestic; social lines were drawn accordingly, roles centring on family or female-oriented activities.

4. Today's *Zongo* Housing

Spatially and socially, Sabon Zongo is considerably changed from its early days. It no longer lies beyond the city limits. There is now a road bridge over the lagoon separating it from downtown Accra. Its residents are far more connected with Accra's other Hausa/Muslim communities [5], especially that of Central Accra, than in the days of Malam Bako.

Sabon Zongo is no longer 'bush', and in place of the maze of alleys which characterizes the downtown *zongo*, each barely wide enough for pedestrians walking in a single file, there are roads laid out in a grid-like pattern, some suitable for motorized traffic. The original compounds still stand, joined by newer houses, mosques, schools, shops and the Gaskia movie theatre.

Sabon Zongo's acreage is bounded by urban fixtures - wide paved streets, electric street lights, public transportation, modern storied buildings, but is itself characterized by their absence. Indeed, Sabon Zongo's changes do not include modern amenities. It is a community area suffering from years of neglect by the city government, the traditional leaders and the private houseowners. Only one through street is paved. The rest

[5] There are currently ten Muslim areas in the Accra district. These include Nima, Alhamdu, Newtown (Lagostown), Adabraka, Accra Central, Sabon Zongo, Abeka, Darkoma, Shukura, and Madina.

are badly rutted and during the rainy season, the rivulets swell to small rivers, making passage difficult. There is no proper drainage system or water closet plumbing. Many houses even lack an outhouse, forcing occupants to use the public toilets, which are barely serviced by the municipality.

The ethnic composition of Sabon Zongo has altered over the years as Muslim northern Ghanaians and non-Ghanaians have moved in. No section of the community is exclusively Hausa. And yet the Hausa do continue to dominate the community in a symbolic sense: their language is the *lingua franca*, their sartorial tradition predominates, they are a model for religious orthodoxy (see Schildkrout, 1978 for Kumase, Ghana). And Hausa food specialities are sold daily at the time they would normally be eaten.

Sabon Zongo has its own market. One section is reserved for butchering, which continues to be a Hausa male enterprise. Throughout the balance of the stalls, women sit behind tables that display the typical array of raw ingredients for meal preparation, of household utensils, of paraphernalia for personal bodily needs. Women also sell on the streets of Sabon Zongo, walking to and fro hawking their wares, or sitting by the curb awaiting customers. Many of the traders in the marketplace and on the street are non-Muslims. Many, however, are also Muslims, and Hausa, like the prepared-food sellers who cater to the tastes of their countrymen [6].

The separation between men and women has eroded considerably, yet reverence for female modesty persists. Celebrations of *rites de passage* such as weddings are still sex-specific, as are economic activities. Men and women belong to gender-specific associations. At a wedding, the *imam* (priest) intoned:

> "No man should go and talk to some woman on the road when she is not his wife. Women should not wear lavender, because when a man is passing, the smell will attract him."

In fact, strict *purdah* marriage is virtually non-existent, and even *tsare* is practiced by few.

While ethnic admixture need not predict the adulteration of Hausa/Muslim rules regarding female seclusion, both elements of change do follow from the weakening of Hausa coherence and exclusiveness. The basic values that adhere in the Hausa homeland are diluted in Accra, Ghana, unlike northern Nigeria, is not a theocracy; the ethos that keeps women in their place, in seclusion, is not prescribed; there is no *purdah* in Accra's society-at-large. Hausa people intermarry with other ethnic groups, including the Dagomba and Buzanga who do not practice *purdah*. And with space at a premium, they live among other ethnic groups in the *zongo*.

While most of the properties are still owned by Hausa, few house only Hausa, let alone members of a single family. Sha'aibu Bako, the current chief, lives in his own house (Figure 3), which represents a modification of the first headman's space. His two wives, their young children, and his grown sons, have rooms there. In addition, the chief rents rooms to three Akan tenants and keeps spare rooms for strangers who need a place to stay while in town on business. As in his grandfather Malam Bako's house, Sha'aibu's quarters and those of his wives are entered through a formal *zaure*,

[6] The Hausa women, less constrained by tradition (or by their husbands), sell out-of-doors. For example, the wives of *kilishi* (the Hausa court official who traditionally spreads the chief's rug and who in Sabon Zongo acts as a subponea-server) sell rice and stew from beneath a lean-to outside of their compound.

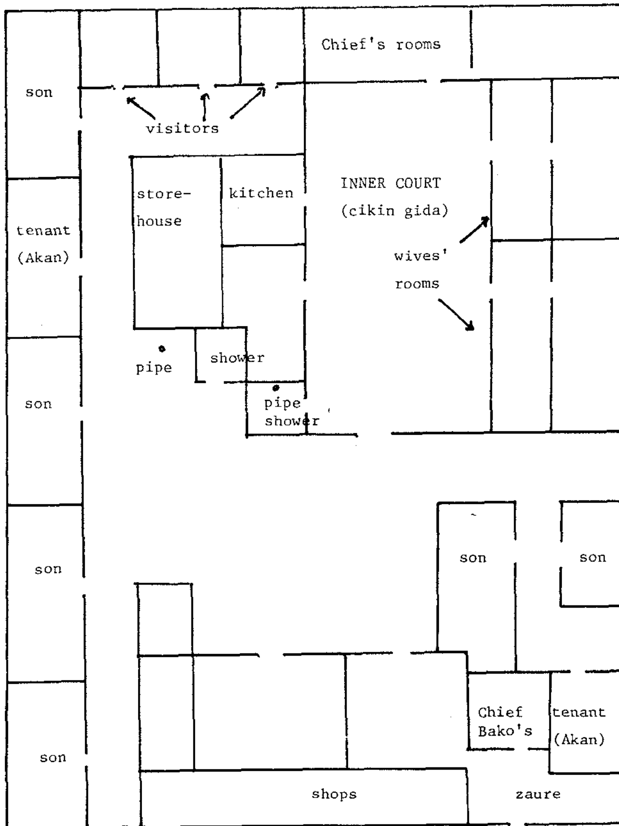

Fig. 3 Compound of the Sabon Zongo's current chief, Sha'aibu Bako. He lives there with his two wives, their young children and his grown sons. The chief also rents rooms to tenants and keeps spare rooms for strangers.

La résidence du chef actuel de Sabon Zongo, Sha'aibu Bako. Il y vit avec ses deux épouses, leurs jeunes enfants et ses deux fils adultes. Il loue également des chambres et en met à disposition de visiteurs.

where he and his courtiers informally meet. There is a large semi-private forecourt and a simple doorway to the *cikin gida*; the chief's room, and his wives rooms within, ring a rectangular courtyard. A second entrance through a doorway on the street gives access to the forecourt and the separate quarters of grown sons and tenants. Thus, principles of Hausa spatial organization take on an altered form.

The chief's wives are responsible for domestic tasks, but they have a less intense relationship with one another than Malam Bako's wives, because they have much more mobility. They are expected to ask permission from their husband before going out, but they can go out. They attend celebrations of life-cycle events but in the company of other women. When out of the house, they carry their head veils, but they do not feel obliged to cover their faces. They greet those who greet them.

Another compound form represents yet another phase in the evolution of spatial and social organization in Sabon Zongo. A typical compound composed of non-related renters (Figure 4) contains nine separate families of nine different ethnicities - Hausa, Kanuri, Fulani, Adar, Zabrama, Kotokoli, and one non-Muslim Akwapim; each inhabits one room. There are neither social nor architectural impediments to free social intercourse. In the event of a vacancy, anyone can rent a room. Anyone is free to enter. Thus, kin and non-kin, Muslim and non-Muslim, Hausa and non-Hausa, men and women, have free access to all semi-public spaces. In earlier times, these were defined more narrowly along the lines of kinship, gender, and activity. All share compound facilities - the central yard, the shower room, the water pipe. Needless to say, there is neither a designated area for the women alone, nor is there a *zaure* or a forecourt. Hausa principles of organization in this Hausa-owned (but multiple-ethnically-occupied) compound are disregarded.

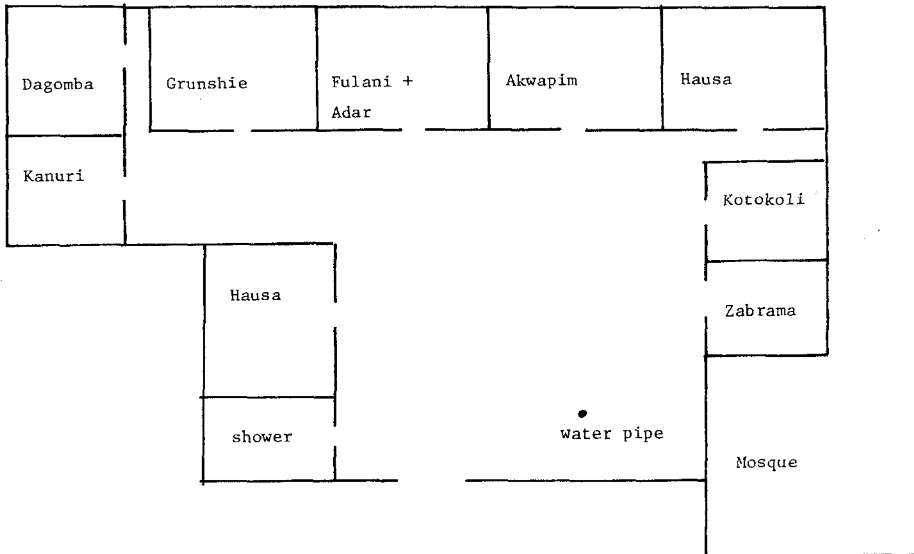

Fig. 4 A tenant compound in Sabon Zongo. It represents yet another phase in the evolution of spatial and social organisation. It contains non-related renters, nine separate families of nine different ethnicities.

Cette résidence représente une autre phase dans l'évolution de l'organisation sociale et spatiale à Sabon Zongo. Y vivent des locataires sans liens de parenté, représentant neuf familles et neuf ethnies différentes.

Malam Bako's aged son Malam Gambo speaks for many when he asks, "How can you make *kulle* with tenants present?". After Bako died, the property was divided up, room by room, for the heirs. While they have not rented out rooms in their family house, this has been a favoured option of other families, such as that of *sarkin fada*, the chief's primary councillor. The general sentiment is that one cannot "do *kulle*" in Accra today because of the expense, a major aspect of which is the housing: one cannot afford and cannot find space to build appropriate housing.

But one can "do *tsare*" (keep the wives partially secluded) [7] and some like Chief Bako do. For unlike *kulle*, it is enough if the woman's ambulation outside of the compound among the general public is curbed; if the husband knows her scheduled outings; if she is not just 'roaming about'. There is little consequence under *tsare* if a man visiting a male friend sees and speaks with the friend's wife.

Men continue to congregate for meals or conversation in semi-public spaces outside of the compound. Many houses do not have a *zaure*, so the men meet in the chief's *zaure* or at the barber's on the street corner or near a house in a space they have defined as theirs. Women, Hausa or not, are also within sight: during daylight hours they are in the street, one the way to a social or business engagement, at the curbside or market buying and selling. But they also continue to congregate among female friends within the home - carrying out chores, celebrating various events, informally frivolling.

5. Final Thoughts

This paper has approached the idea of what built form does by looking at the evolution of housing in a migrant community in Accra, and the relationships among changing ownership of physical structures, changing ideas of sexual segregation and morality, and people's housing preferences.

Since its creation 70-odd years ago, Sabon Zongo has grown from a population of 150 to a densely-packed 12000, from 'bush' to peripheral urban area. The population is more ethnically varied but the tone is 'northern'. The *zongo* culture is reinforced through spatial forms - public structures, such as mosques, and domestic vernacular. Its physical development reflects various African built traditions and the incorporation of European methods of organization, economy, and culture - for example, the importation of building materials.

The *zongo* is heavily influenced by Hausa custom, but as that has weakened, the community has evolved its *own* culture. For reasons of economy, acculturation and perhaps - as Duncan (1982) has theorized - of individualization, the compound in Sabon Zongo is no longer only a family establishment, a "container of women". Tenant housing dispenses with the *zaure* and *cikin gida*, suggesting a change from Hausa attitudes towards gender roles but different from those of mainstream southern Ghana: a redefinition of needs of 'symbolic shelter' (the veiling and/or seclusion of married women), a broadening of acceptable behaviour (as girls marry later and, like boys, attend western school and learn new skills).

Deplorable conditions notwithstanding, space in Sabon Zongo is at a terrific premium. Many clamour to live there. This in itself is not surprising, given the economics of the situation. Here, as in the inner city areas of Accra Central and Lagos (Nigeria's capital), are concentrated the lowest and most casually employed individuals. They provide cheap labour, but society does not want to invest in good housing for them and thereby subtract from its prosperity (Marris, 1979).

But economics is only part of the story. What is more intriguing is that even those who own good housing *elsewhere* prefer to reside in sub-standard housing in the *zongo*. Their reasoning is socio-cultural in nature: if they are spatially removed, they

[7] This is clearly a much less strict definition of *tsare* than is used in Kano, where those living under *tsare* have little mobility outside of the compound, and especially not during the daylight hours.

feel cut-off from their cultural nexus and social network. Sabon Zongo may be run-down, but long-term tenure of residents and viable informal sector work has resulted in networks of kinship and mutual support (cf. Marris, 1979, 427).

Thus it is important that we heed Marris' words of wisdom (1979) and consider the social context of Sabon Zongo and tread carefully in characterizing such a community as a 'slum'. The housing and community spaces, albeit deteriorated, are highly valued. We have learned from John Turner (1972; 1976) that it is not what housing *is* but what it *does* in people's lives. We can surely extrapolate from housing to the community context of the housing as well. Effective planning, which retains the socio-cultural context, is imperative. Self-improvement, through the involvement of networks of local individuals at least in the planning, if not in the construction and management, of community development in the Third World has been shown to be highly effective (cf. Mangin, 1970).

Lifeways have evolved and the spaces that facilitate them have as well. The *zongos* should be re-developed, and the Sabon Zongo Youth Association is an organized group that is actively involved in generating interest among community members and raising funds and attracting professional advice toward this end. According to their secretary, they deemed it necessary to take the initiative: to raise money and hire a contractor to redo the roads, the delapidated gutters and the street lights. It is their hope that the government will then view the effort positively and help them out.

The workability of a house or a community space has more to do with cultural values than the introduction of modern amenities. The compound house, for example, should be retained; obliterating it in favour of western-style bungalows in Lagos seriously damaged social cohesion and individual belongingness (Marris, 1961). When talking about the redevelopment or renewal of housing or community layout, the word 'improvement' often enters. Like slum, improvement is a value judgement. Design most not neglect spatial attachments and culture-specific elaborations if it is to succeed.

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